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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
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ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN ON ITS THIRTEENTH SESSION

Draft report

Rapporteur: Ms. Teresita QUINTOS-DELES (Philippines)

Addendum

III. CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION

Barbados

1. The Committee considered the combined second and third periodic reports of Barbados (CEDAW/C/BAR/2-3) at its 245th meeting on 26 January 1994.

2. In introducing the report, the representative of the Government noted that the country had suffered from the global economic crisis, which had led to a decline in the gross domestic product and to the introduction of stabilization and structural adjustment measures that were beginning to have an effect. The measures had not been painless and women had been disproportionately affected by them, including through an increased unemployment rate which was higher than that for men.

3. Educational opportunities were now largely equal and girls were generally more successful than boys. There had also been significant improvement in law reform, particularly in the area of family legislation, including domestic violence and sexual offences. The national machinery, the Bureau of Women's Affairs, had been supported by the reinstitution of the National Advisory Council on Women and a project to strengthen the Bureau further had been approved by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

1. General observations

4. In response to a question about the reaction of the public in general, and especially men, to the economic and social progress achieved by women, the representative stated that the general public appeared comfortable with the changes, although some men and some women traditionalists had experienced difficulty in accepting changes. A variety of strategies had been pursued to raise the level of consciousness of men and women regarding changes, including use of the mass media, community organizations and the normative effect of judicial decisions. The evidence from divorce statistics, which were declining, suggested that there was increasing, rather than decreasing, harmony.

5. An additional question asked whether there had been a negative reaction by men, to which the representative replied that some negative reaction had been expected, but an effort had been made to have those reactions expressed in various forums. It was noted that Barbadian society was affected by a number of influences, including an African heritage, United Kingdom colonial rule and proximity to the United States through transnational media. One example of change was the rapid introduction of coeducation, which had provoked a reaction among some men who preferred single-sex schools.

6. Replying to a question on consultation with NGOs in the preparation of the report and publicity given the Convention and the reports, the representative referred to the extensive use of media programmes on gender issues in which references to the Convention had been frequent.

7. In response to a request for further details on consultation with NGOs, to which the representative replied that women's organizations and other NGOs were all invited by the Bureau of Women's Affairs to provide input to the report in their areas of competence, and that input formed the basis of the report. In addition the media were involved in advertising the report, which was circulated in the media, and its content discussed publicly. Its content was also included in the gender training programme for the leadership of the women's organizations.

2. Questions related to specific articles

Article 2

8. Responding to a question on the extent to which the Constitution had been amended as a result of ratification of the Convention to ensure a constitutional provision for equality and the steps being taken to eliminate elements of discrimination, the representative noted that under the country's judicial system, treaties had to be implemented through enactment of municipal legislation. That was why an effort had been made at law reform, which had removed most legal obstacles to equality, and 10 major amended statutes were cited. The Constitution itself provided for equal treatment of all citizens without discrimination. Legislation was still required in the area of violence, sexual offences, citizenship and disparities among public officers.

9. A question posed on the implementation of the programme of women in the 1988-1989 development plan, to which the representative replied that the plan envisaged a national policy on women, including greater participation in decision-making, health and employment, work on areas requiring further legislative changes, training and technical assistance through the Women's Bureau, programmes to facilitate inter-agency cooperation and studies. A new plan covering the period 1993-2000 had been prepared, emphasizing strengthening of the Women's Bureau, women's organizations and other policy-making agencies.

Article 5

10. In response to a series of questions about actions to deal with domestic violence, including, in particular, the Domestic Violence Protection Orders Act of 1992, the representative noted that the legislation was based on protection orders and covered both legal and de facto unions. The Sexual Offences Act of 1992 updated legislation dealing with rape and other sexual offences. The interpretation and decisions of the Courts had clearly indicated that the legislation should protect against violence. A media programme for public education and other measures, including training for police and counselling for families affected by violence were to be implemented.

11. An additional question related to whether the inclusion of women in the national plan had had any effect in reducing stereotypes. The representative replied that activities included obtaining data for reports to CEDAW and the Organization of American States, as well as research on the impact of SAPs on women, especially on single-headed households. Gender training and women's studies were part of the university curriculum and school texts had been reviewed to eliminate gender bias.

Article 6

12. Referring to questions posed during the consideration of the initial report, the question was asked whether the Government had taken measures to curb prostitution as a major vector in the spread of HIV/AIDS and whether programmes had been established to rehabilitate prostitutes. The representative replied that trafficking in women was illegal and covered by the Sexual Offences Act. There was also an effort to curb prostitution to deal with HIV/AIDS through public education, mass media and training of medical personnel.

13. Additional questions were asked as to whether prostitution was related to the tourism industry and whether it was increasing or decreasing. In reply, the representative stated that prostitution was not an organized phenomenon and was rather a form of self-employment and for that reason was hard to quantify. There was no evidence that it was linked to the tourism industry as was the case in some countries.

Article 7

14. A question was posed regarding the limited number of women in decision-making positions, especially given the fact that in several age groups women outnumbered men. The representative stated that there were no legal barriers to women's participation, women participated actively in campaigning and voting and

there were a number of women in high positions, including the post of Governor-General. However, in the most recent election, only one woman had been elected to the House of Assembly, although six currently served in the Senate, where members were appointed.

15. In response to additional questions on government measures to encourage women's participation, it was stated that there was a contradiction between the number of women's candidacies and the electorate, which had a female voting majority. All candidates received the same kind of government support. The IDB project would provide for workshops to do consciousness-raising in all sectors and levels of the Government and the private sector.

16. Replying to a question as to whether the policy of having equal numbers of men and women on several boards would be applied to other boards, the representative stated that women were still a minority on most boards and, although there had been some improvement, it was not as significant as might be hoped. There was no quota system in place and the composition of boards was related to technical knowledge, although the government policy now placed emphasis on equity. The Women's Bureau was preparing a directory of resource persons in specific fields which it hoped would be used to help to equalize the situation.

17. On a question relating to the relationships between women's organizations affiliated with the Women's Bureau and the Bureau itself, it was stated that the Bureau was the national machinery for women and had a mandate to involve all women's organizations. The representative noted that many social development initiatives came from women's organizations, which were recognized by the Government and some of which received subventions.

Article 8

18. In response to a question on the measures being taken to enhance the representation of women in international organizations and at the international level, the representative stated that there had been some improvement and that Barbadian women had been active in a number of international forums. The appointment of women to senior civil service positions meant that there would be greater representation by women at international conferences and other activities.

Article 9

19. In reply to a question on action taken to amend the law on citizenship to permit spouses of Barbadian women to obtain citizenship, the representative stated that the law was already being addressed and that it would also deal with the transmission of citizenship by a married woman to her child.

Article 10

20. A question was asked about whether the Government intended to implement a policy to ensure women equal access to vocational training in areas where men predominated and to encourage girls to enter non-traditional professions. In reply, the representative stated that vocational training and instruction were

equally available to women and men and that guidance counsellors were seeking to encourage girls to enter non-traditional fields. That was reflected in the fact that more women were entering those fields in the labour force.

21. In reply to a question on the social science subjects included in the curricula of schools, the training of teaching staff and the participation of women in pedagogical and research activities, the representative stated that social science subjects were included in the curricula at all levels and that the majority of participants in teacher training were women.

22. Responding to a question on whether the subject of human rights had been introduced into the curriculum and at what levels, the representative stated that human rights was a component of the family life education syllabus and was offered as a separate subject at the university level.

23. An additional question was posed on the educational measures taken to encourage non-traditional education. The representative noted the work of women in development units within the Women's Bureau in the development of gender training, which had had a significant impact; boys were also picking up that training. There had also been a six-month radio call-in programme for public education on violence against women and there had also been similar discussions on means and measures taken by the Government on SAPs with a view to providing retraining programmes to develop women's productive skills and enable them to participate in income-generating activities.

Article 11

24. The question was raised of whether there was a guaranteed minimum wage and an unemployment allowance necessary to ensure maintenance of a family's living standard, and of how the provisions of the ILO Conventions on equal pay for work of equal value were being implemented and monitored. The representative stated that the principle of equal pay had been implemented, there were guaranteed minimum wages for shop assistants and domestic employees and unemployment benefits were available.

25. Additional questions were asked on the measures taken to implement the ILO Conventions by legislation and whether there had been any equal pay cases filed. In reply, the representative noted that implementation required specific legislation, some of which had been adopted but that details would be provided in the next report.

26. Responding to a question as to why more women were jobless than men and measures taken to address that phenomenon, the representative stated that it was a result of the changing world economic environment and SAPs, which had affected areas where women predominated. The Government had taken a number of steps to address the situation, including retraining and measures to stimulate economic productivity in both export and local areas.

27. Questions were asked about participation of women in trade unions, especially in terms of women's membership and participation at decision-making levels. In reply, the representative stated that no restrictions were placed on women's participation in trade unions, and women were involved as members and in

decision-making on an increasing basis. For example, some unions, like teachers' unions, had 50-50 representation at the highest level. Public workers' unions were seeing an increase in women at management levels through their efforts to raise the confidence of women to participate at decision-making levels.

28. In reply to a question on the social allowances and benefits enjoyed by working women, including child care, organized relaxation and assistance in building a home and in daily domestic services, the representative replied that benefits were available under the national insurance scheme, workers' compensation, severance payments and free medical services in polyclinics. Day care was also available, public workers could benefit from a housing loan scheme and there were other programmes available to assist in home purchases or construction.

Article 12

29. In response to a question on whether health-care bodies had improved their effectiveness in diagnosing and treating cancer since the last report, the representative stated that there were a number of efforts at early detection and treatment under the leadership of an NGO, the Barbados Cancer Society, as well as educational and promotional programmes. As a result, the impact of breast and cervical cancers had decreased. The programmes were projected for expansion into hospice care.

Article 13

30. The question was asked whether informal organizations that had begun accepting women members brought them to decision-making levels and whether they were able to participate in all of the social activities of the Bridgetown Club. The representative stated that the main service organizations had amalgamated their men's and women's branches and women served in the leadership of the clubs. Women now participated in membership and other activities of the Bridgetown Club.

Article 16

31. In reply to questions about the number of divorces, the trends in single-parent families, the nature of the family as set out in the law and limits to the free choice by women of a spouse, the representative pointed out that no specific studies had been done on fluctuations in divorce rates but that the incidence of divorce had decreased between 1989 and 1992 and more women than men were filing for divorce. The concept of family was embodied in all family legislation, affirming that it was the basic unit of society and providing for counselling prior to any divorce proceedings and procedures for equitable maintenance, custody of children and equitable distribution of marital assets. Those provisions were also applied to parties in de facto unions. There were no limits to the rights of women in the free choice of a spouse.

32. An additional question asked whether, given the possibility of the same person having a de facto in addition to a legal marriage, that constituted a form of polygamy. In reply, the representative stated that, once a person was

married, that took precedence over any other relationship and a person could only be legally married to one person. However, protection was accorded to the children of another union.

33. Another question again raised the issue of the rate of divorce, asking reasons for changes and asking whether procedures for reconciliation achieved the desired goal. In reply, it was noted that there was no evidence on the question but that it merited further study.